Dealing with Feelings of Loss and Stress Caused by COVID-19

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Who is in Attendance?

Poll 1

- My student is the first in our family to go to college.
- Many generations in my family have gone to college.
Who is in Attendance?

Poll 2

☑️ We are a UMD legacy family, with multiple generations having studied at UMD.

☑️ We are new to UMD and starting our journey as a Terp family.
Who is in Attendance?

Poll 3

☐ Caregivers of first year student?
☐ Caregivers of second year student?
☐ Caregivers of third year student?
☐ Caregivers of fourth year student?
☐ Caregivers of graduate student?
Why this Presentation?

- We are living through an unprecedented situation with this pandemic.
- We are feeling a lot of things.
- There is a lot of uncertainty in our lives.
- Each and every one of us has been touched by this pandemic at a variety of levels / in multiple areas of our lives.
- We do not know when this pandemic will end and what its lasting impact will be.
What Do You Hope to Gain from this Webinar?

Poll 4

- Understanding the process of grief and loss.
- Exploring the variety of ambiguous and anticipatory losses we are experiencing.
- Learning strategies for coping with the anxiety and stress of our current situation.
- Hearing suggestions for helping my student cope with the losses in their life.
Ambiguous Grief

When the grief that we experience lacks a point of focus on a specific, tangible loss, it can be described as ambiguous grief. For example:

- Loss of senior year
- Graduating students not being able to participate in commencement
- Prolonged disruption of interpersonal connections
- Loss of an offered position (e.g. internship) or difficulty securing a job
- Significant disruption of life; loss of usual routine
Anticipatory Grief

Grief about anticipated losses, which have not even come to pass as yet.

- Can arise when we are worried about a loved one who is ill.
- Also occurs when we know something bad is happening -- even when we can’t see it, like a virus.
- We might ask ourselves, “What is going to happen?”
- The feeling of uncertainty is compounded by a loss of sense of safety.
The Flow of Grief

- **Denial**: This virus is not real, this virus will not affect us, it is the same as regular flu.

- **Anger**: How dare people ask me to stay home and restrict my activities? I am angry about all this social distancing nonsense.

- **Bargaining**: Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right?

- **Depression / Sadness**: I don’t know when this will end, I cannot take this any more.

- **Acceptance**: This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed.

- **Meaning Making**: Why did this happen to us?
How Do People Grieve?

**Intuitive griever**
- Focus on feelings and affect

**Instrumental griever**
- Action, problem-solving and cognitions

**Blended griever**
- Do both

**Dissonant griever**
- Internal experiences do not match external expressions
What Type of A Grieiver Are You?

Poll 5

- Intuitive Grieiver
- Instrumental Grieiver
- Blended Grieiver
- Dissonant Grieiver
Common Reactions to Grief

Feelings/Emotions: Anger, irritability, sadness, depression, guilt, anxiety, shock, helplessness, numbing, loneliness.

Physical Reactions: Low energy, headaches, muscle weakness, hollowness in stomach, nausea, shaking, trembling, shortness of breath.

Thought Reactions: Confusion, disbelief, obsessive thoughts, forgetfulness, preoccupation.

Behavioral Reactions: Problems with eating and sleeping, social withdrawal, absent-mindedness, dreams/nightmares, crying.
Coping with Grief and Stress

- Physical self care.
- Emotional self care.
- Express your feelings.
- Seek support.
- Participate.
- Consider seeking professional help.

"Grief is NOT a disorder, a disease or sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve" -- Earl Grollman
How to Support Others

- Talk openly about what has been lost and the associated feelings.
- Be available. Your presence in their lives is important.
- Take some actions.
- Encourage the person of concern to take care of themselves physically, emotionally, and socially -- and to ask for help, if appropriate.
- Accept your own limitations.
Helping Your Student

Name and normalize students’ reactions to loss resulting from the COVID-9 crisis, including anxiety, uncertainty and sadness.

Parents and other caregivers can suggest a number of ways to reduce stress:

- Practice self-care: keeps your immune system strong and your emotional reserves full.
- Have realistic expectations.
Helping Your Student

- Establish a routine.
- Seek out social support.
- Check in with others.
- Find ways to manage disappointment.
Helping Your Student

- Limit your media consumption.
- Let go of things that you can’t control.

”Surrender to what is. Let go of what was. Have faith in what will be.”

- Sonia Ricotti
References

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- https://giveanhour.org/covid-providers/
- Grief presentation to the UMD Counseling Center by Dr. Karen O’Brien in Nov 2019